

# Chapter 1 Introduction

## Background to Research

Adelaide, the capital of the state of South Australia, was founded as a free settlement in 1836, part of the 19th Century British colonising imperative. It is an exemplar of a former British colony where much of the contemporary symbolic landscape, as expressed through public commemorations, civic places and buildings, is derivative of the European tradition (Cameron, 1997, Pickles 2006). Besley (2005:38) noted 'The desire for monuments is part of the colonialist impulse'. For much of its history Adelaide has been a mirror of the 'mother culture', as exemplified in the statue of King Edward VII (Figure 1-1) on Adelaide's main cultural boulevard of North Terrace. As Besley (2005:38) reminded us 'Like cartography, the erection of outdoor cultural objects is a European way of marking the landscape. In the Western tradition of commemoration, material objects such as plaques, statues and cairns are made to stand for memory'.



Figure 1-1 King Edward VII, 1920, North Terrace, Adelaide

In Adelaide, as elsewhere in Australia, Aboriginal people have been a marginalised group and, until recently, largely excluded from mainstream society. They have been seen as peripheral to the colonising endeavour and a modern society (Stanner, 1979). The historic marginalisation of Aboriginal people has the logical extension of exclusion from the commemorative and symbolic functions of the public space as expressed through monuments, memorials, public art and the like, or cultural markers as I will call them. As in other postcolonial cities, Aboriginal (or Indigenous) peoples have largely been excluded from these public space cultural markers. Hutton (1993:78) has stated that:

*Space is colonised by the erection of commemorative structures on the terrain, power is asserted by the exclusion of the commemorative practices of others.*

Geographers (Hansford, 1996, Jacobs, 1996, Dunn, 1997, Osborne, 2001, Hay, et al., 2004) have outlined how symbolic value and power is invested in the construct of the

public space and its representations of cultural heritage through its cultural markers. As Osborne (2001:10) outlined:

*...monuments focus attention on specific places and events and are central to this endeavour of constructing symbolic landscapes of power.*

These statements succinctly encapsulate ongoing problematic issues regarding the representation, or lack of representation, of Aboriginal peoples in public spaces and the cultural landscape as Australia nominally moves towards being a post-colonial and pluralist society.

The cultural markers in the public space in turn contribute to cultural identity at both civic and personal levels, as well as the privileging or marginalising of particular groups, sub-groups or classes of citizens. The public space reflects how we see ourselves as a people, our power structures and how we present ourselves to each other and to our visitors. Thus when Aboriginal people are not represented in the public space, or do not have effective control over the means of representation, positive reinforcement of their cultural identity is diminished; culture and people become invisible. They are neglected by, or seen as being of no consequence to, the dominant culture; they are not part of the cultural landscape nor invited to participate as full citizens of the state.

A change in the status of Aboriginal people in Australia commenced in the 1960s, as exemplified through the 1967 Commonwealth referendum on Aboriginal issues. Since then there has been an ongoing process of legislative, legal and community actions to improve the social and economic position of Aboriginal peoples in Australia and reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. However, there has been no research in Adelaide as to the effect of these changes on Aboriginal public space inclusion.

Whilst public space commemorations, or cultural markers, are traditionally seen as monuments, memorials, public statuary and plaques, since the 1960s/1970s there has been an evolution in the forms of public space representations through public art which provided for a broader scope of both artistic expression and social inclusion. The evolution of public art, in all its forms from large scale sculpture to aerosol art, has provided for a dramatic broadening in the range of public space cultural and social expression, the styles of artworks and the number of artists, as well as communities, that can participate in the making of artworks in the public space. As will be outlined, public space art and design and public space artists have significantly contributed to Aboriginal inclusion and expression. Whilst De Lorenzo (2005:105) pointed out that 'a determined look around central public spaces in any Australian city or country town will show few public art works by settler Australians acknowledging Aboriginal pre-contact, much less post settler existence' it is, I suggest, necessary to look beyond the 'central spaces' to fully comprehend what may have occurred. In social processes, change can occur at the 'edge' before it gravitates to the 'centre'. 'Nor' she said 'are there any documented accounts of 'unofficial' contemporary Indigenous visual art works that explicitly expose the gaps in mainstream public art'. This presents two problems, one of what has been documented to date and the other, of what has actually been surveyed.

Public commemorations can potentially contribute to the social advancement of and equity for Aboriginal people by making them a more positive and valued part of the

cultural and symbolic landscape and integral to the contemporary and future nation of Australia, at the same time as recognising the past. As Jacobs (1996:35) pointed out, heritage making 'is a dynamic process of creation in which a multiplicity of pasts jostle for the present purpose of being sanctified as heritage', a process whereby 'identity is defined, debated and contested and where social values are challenged or reproduced'. But there is still a dilemma; are Aboriginal people being included as part of an Australian heritage by way of an unthinking assimilationist process that includes their heritage under the terms and conditions of the dominant culture or are forms of public space heritage making being evolved that are Aboriginal in nature?

As alluded to by De Lorenzo for Australian cities in general, in Adelaide knowledge of Aboriginal representation in the central public space through any forms of cultural markers is scant. An examination of the cultural boulevard of North Terrace, Adelaide (Hay et al., 2004) revealed minor, if not peripheral, representation only. Little is recorded, not only in central spaces but beyond, about what artworks or other forms of Aboriginal acknowledgement exist, where they are located, who initiated them, who created them, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, their state of repair, and whether they are under threat from neglect or development. There has been no systematic survey. This represents a serious gap in the knowledge of what Aboriginal public space representation may exist in Adelaide, how it came about and how it may then be interpreted or linked to broader social changes.

In stark contrast to the coloniser's tradition, Australian Aboriginal cultures evolved their symbolic and mnemonic landscapes in the topography itself. At times this was accompanied by human hand expression, for example through cave paintings, petroglyphs and rock peckings, as exemplified in the Marlawahinha Inbiri rock art (Figure 1-2) of the Adnyamathanha people, located in Chambers Gorge in northern South Australia. Much of a traditional and ongoing Aboriginal identity is invested in the land itself rather than the constructed landscape. In Adelaide a well known signifier is the Tjilbruke Dreaming and the physical landscape features Tjilbruke created. They form a landscape of memory and lore.



Figure 1-2 Marlawahinha Inbiri, Adnyamathanha Country, South Australia

David and Wilson (2002:1) recognised that both forms of place marking have social relevance and pointed out that 'Rock-art, monuments, and other social and personal expressions of place marking signal a cultural presence and give the land social

significance'. So what then happens for Aboriginal people as urban dwellers? How can they be included when there are such differing cultural traditions? For Aboriginal peoples, new forms of Aboriginal cultural commemorations and narratives have been and are required, or the 'reinvention of tradition' (Hobshawm & Ranger, 1983), to supplement or renew meaning formerly invested in the topography itself as part of their own contemporary cultural presentation, symbolic meaning and sense of self. This is not the same as the dominant culture recognising Aboriginal culture within its own paradigm of public space artefacts but both I suggest are required.

There has however also been little analysis of the impact public space representations have had, whether they are contributing to Aboriginal empowerment and cultural renewal, and the reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Australia, or whether they are merely 'whitefella feel good' projects and also serving conservative political interests. The role and effectiveness of the nation's most high profile symbolic Aboriginal public space inclusion, *Reconciliation Place*, in Canberra is disputed (Jenkins, 1998, De Lorenzo, 2005, Read, 2008). For further analysis to occur elsewhere it is necessary to firstly know what is there.

## **Research Aims**

The preceding section identifies some ongoing problematic issues regarding the representation, manner of representation, or lack of representation of Aboriginal peoples in public spaces as Australia, as a nation, nominally moves towards being a post-colonial and pluralist society. However no comprehensive documentation of Aboriginal representation currently exists. This then poses the question: To what extent and how are Aboriginal people represented in public spaces in Adelaide? The central aim of this thesis is to engage with this question, which is applicable Australia wide, by investigating one capital city, greater metropolitan Adelaide. This research is constituted by locating and documenting what Aboriginal public space representation exists, how it came about, why organisations and individuals contributed to Aboriginal public space representation and what issues may come to light, for instance, the quality of the narrative contained in the representations, how might any public space inclusion be expanded, and what is of cultural significance.

Adelaide is a medium sized Australian capital city and South Australia is known as the 'Festival State' with strong patronage of, and activity in, the arts. It had the first comprehensive public art program in Australia (Arts SA, 2000). It is also the most practical place to undertake a case study combining 'purpose and serendipity' (Bradford & Stratford, 2005:70) as I am an Adelaide-based (non-Aboriginal) artist and have worked work collaboratively with the Kaurna people, the Aboriginal people of the Adelaide region, on public space art and design projects over a fifteen year period. Logistically, Adelaide is my logical research area to undertake field research. My personal connection is to Adelaide. Determining what has occurred in Adelaide provides a case study that can potentially be tested elsewhere but most importantly, enables the citizens of Adelaide to know what has occurred in their place.

No prior comprehensive research of this type has been undertaken in Adelaide, and there were no exemplars able to be located elsewhere in Australia or in the decolonised nations of the former British Empire where the colonisers have displaced the Indigenous peoples (i.e. Canada and New Zealand). This is different to decolonised nations where the decolonised people have regained sovereignty. Aboriginal Australians have not regained sovereignty over their lands. Central to

achieving the thesis's aim was the necessity of developing a methodology to locate works in the geographic and social space of Adelaide. Once located, and because of the large number that were located, a structure and taxonomy to group and classify works located, and to develop a data base, became necessary.

This research provides an historical overview not elsewhere documented or discussed. It provides a benchmark for further analysis, the critique of what has been located from various disciplines and a guide to conduct similar research elsewhere. It will assist the development of forms of representation by documenting and understanding what already exists and how that may be built upon in the future. The historical exclusion and more recent inclusion of Aboriginal people from the public space can be seen as reflecting broader social attitudes and trends. In its study of Aboriginal public space representation the thesis is also a reflection on the ongoing decolonisation process for Aboriginal people as represented by Aboriginal inclusion in the symbolic value of the public space.

The fields of study of Aboriginal public space and social inclusion extend well beyond the parameters of this thesis. Whilst at times the fields are inter-related, this thesis could not engage all aspects and it is therefore appropriate to outline what this thesis does not aim to include:

**Place Naming.** The thesis does not engage with the use of Aboriginal place names, contemporary neologisms and street and building naming as a form of Aboriginal public space inclusion. Reference is made to the use of the Kaurna language and place naming when applicable to Aboriginal Cultural Markers. I define Aboriginal Cultural Markers as monuments, memorials, public art and design, community art and commemorative and interpretive plaques that refer to, or are by, Aboriginal people (Chapter 3).

The revival of the Kaurna language and the use of Kaurna language in public space naming in Adelaide and elsewhere in Kaurna Country is facilitated (non-exclusively) by Kaurna Warra Pintyandi (KWP), the Kaurna language group, coordinated by linguist Dr Rob Amery at the University of Adelaide. KWP manages the Kaurna Place Names project which aims to 'identify and map places with Kaurna names and to encourage the use and increase knowledge of these names. It begins with names in southern Kaurna country'. As KWP has stated '*Bultonarri paiema, ngadlu yerta tampendi*. When we understand the place names, we recognise the land' (University of Adelaide, 2010).

**Art Criticism.** The thesis does not engage in art criticism although some comment is made when relevant to a discussion. Public art, although dominant, is only one form of public space cultural marking. To critique the arts based Markers from an artistic point of view overlooks the contributions of other forms of Markers. It would also interpret them from a Western artistic perspective rather than a social and cultural impact perspective. Any form of criticism, to be effective, requires an informed Aboriginal input or co-writing with Aboriginal people and that is beyond the aim of this thesis.

**Art History.** The thesis does not engage in contextualising the Markers in terms of art history, Western or Aboriginal, although some comment is made when relevant to a discussion. Some of the Markers may, over time, be critiqued and included within the parameters of the discipline of art history. Many, if not most, will not as they sit

outside of that discipline. The public space artworks were not commissioned as unfettered artworks in their own right, they were (mainly) commissioned to fulfil a social agenda.

**International Comparisons.** The thesis does not engage in comparisons with Indigenous or minority representations in countries overseas. The Indigenous histories of New Zealand, Canada and America have such different processes and outcomes in terms of colonisation, retention of Indigenous lands by Indigenous peoples, land rights, treaties, settlement patterns and commemorations that it is a field of study in itself.

In Australia the reality of Aboriginal land rights or native title only came about through the High Court of Australia decision in 1992 (*Mabo and Others v Queensland-No. 2.*) The resolution of the impact of that decision is still very much a work in progress. Whilst there may be superficial similarities between Australia and the countries mentioned they are different in detail and practicalities because of the legal, social and cultural realities of each nation.

## **Overview of the Research**

Contrary to my expectations I have discovered extensive representation of Aboriginal peoples and culture in the public space in greater metropolitan Adelaide. I have also found that this representation evolved over a fifty year period. I have identified five distinct phases of representation to date and propose that a sixth phase to reflect greater Aboriginal self-determination appears likely and, if we are to become a post-colonial and pluralist society, desirable.

The thesis is structured into eleven chapters. Chapter 2 surveys the literature and discusses the symbolic value of the public space, the concept of civic and public art, and the role of visual artists, and others, as the creators of contemporary public space artefacts and symbolic value, and the lack of critical writing on public space practice. Chapter 3 locates my position in relation to the research and provides definitions of terms developed or adopted. The term Aboriginal Cultural Marker describes all forms of public space representation included in this thesis and Marker is used as an abbreviation of this term. The chapter outlines the research methodology developed to locate and identify forms of Aboriginal public space inclusion. This was an evolving and reflective approach pursued in cycles to facilitate interaction with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, to locate and understand the history of the Markers and to provide for research output to the community, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal during the study period. A survey of greater metropolitan Adelaide, comprising seventeen councils (or local government areas) was conducted. In the light of what was learned, the chapter outlines a methodology for locating and documenting Aboriginal inclusion in the public space in order that the principles of this study might be applied to other places.

Chapter 4 outlines the characteristics of the six phases of the evolution of Aboriginal representation in the public space in Adelaide and draws some comparison with phases, or themes, in the evolution of Aboriginal architecture and contemporary Aboriginal art practice also involved in the evolution of Aboriginal identity and public space recognition. In tracing Aboriginal exclusion from the public space (from colonisation) and then gradual inclusion (since the 1960s), a narrative evolves which reflects: the gradual and ongoing decolonisation process; a nation coming to terms with its treatment of Aboriginal peoples through the process of Reconciliation; an

evolving self-determination by Aboriginal peoples; and, ultimately, public self-representation by Aboriginal peoples.

Chapter 5 discusses the historical absence of Aboriginal representation in Adelaide, details the Aboriginal Cultural Markers found in phases one and two and documents, in detail, the genesis of several early works to understand how and why they came about and who was responsible for this change in the public space narrative. Artists have been significant contributors. Critical arts practice tends to be at the leading edge of new ideas or thinking, the concept of the *avant-garde*. Whether it is as personal expression, or the creative interpretation of a project brief, artists have been at the forefront of contributing to the inclusion and understanding of Aboriginality through cultural markers in the public space.

Chapter 6 details Markers located in the middle period, phase three, and Chapters 7 and 8 detail the Markers in the later phases, four and five. A distinction is made between pan-Aboriginal and Kaurna-specific representations in the later phases.

Chapter 9 discusses an anticipated sixth phase, which is about the greater management and determination of their public space representation by Kaurna including control of their cultural production, and ways to strengthen the inclusion of Kaurna culture in the public space. It identifies themes and locations for future works for consideration by Kaurna and commissioning bodies.

Chapter 10 traces one of the significant outcomes of Aboriginal inclusion which has been the contemporary public space representations and interpretations of the law and lore of the Kaurna Ancestor Being Tjilbruke and the Tjilbruke Dreaming. These Markers span the phases. How they came about, their style, forms, periods and locations are discussed to explain how they contribute to an evolving public space presence and urban identity for Kaurna people and others.

Chapter 11 discusses criteria for assessing the significance of works. It further presents what Markers have been found by type of artwork, geographic distribution and type of space, and numbers by council areas and documents what Markers are known to have been lost. It then makes comment on the curation of this evolving public collection.

Chapter 12 briefly summarises what has been found and makes some conclusions around what the research findings tells us about our evolution towards a society more inclusive and respectful of Aboriginal people and culture. It also presents some recommendations about actions that are needed to increase the likelihood of progressing to Kaurna management and determination of their representation in the public spaces of Adelaide and finishes with some concluding comments on social outcomes.

Not quite a battle ground but definitely a contested space, the public arena acts out the plot, and plays out the narratives, as we, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, define and redefine ourselves to each other and to those who visit our place. In this research project, a story of Aboriginal exclusion and gradual inclusion in this meta-narrative is articulated.

## Kurna Country Acknowledgement

Before further outlining my research project I introduce and acknowledge the Kurna Aboriginal people. Adelaide, South Australia, the thesis study area, is located on their ancestral lands, or Country as I will call it. Their traditional Country extends from Cape Jervis to the south of Adelaide to Crystal Brook to the north, and west of the Mount Lofty Ranges to the coast of Gulf Saint Vincent (Figure 1-3). This geographic region is defined in terms of the Kurna People's Native Title Claim, Tribunal No. SC/001, lodged 25 October 2000 and accepted for registration by the responsible federal Minister, 22 August 2001. There is broad community acceptance of this definition of Kurna Country<sup>1</sup>. The Kurna people, as a nation, still do not have legal title to any of their ancestral lands.

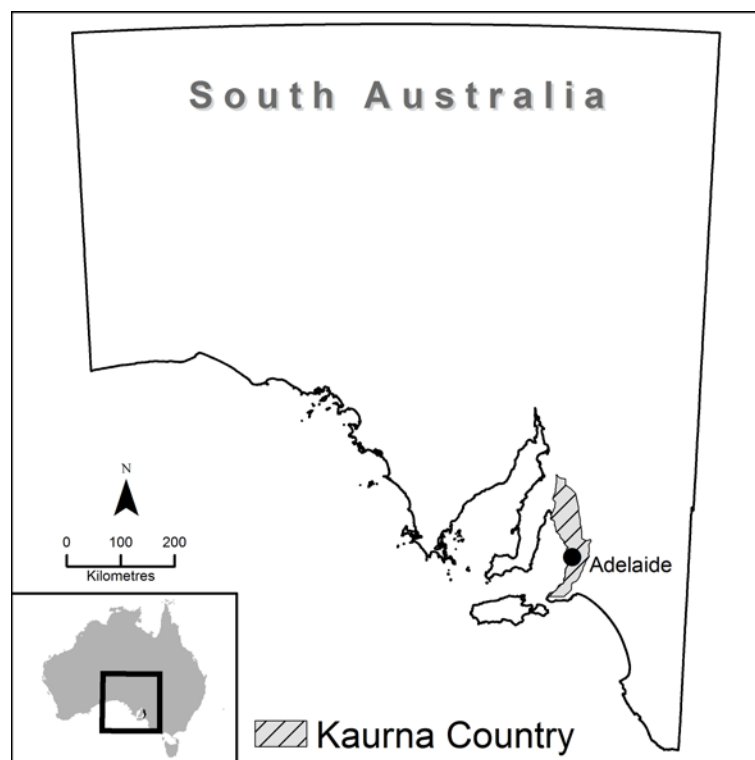


Figure 1-3 Kurna Country (courtesy Robert Keane, Flinders University)

Following the founding of Adelaide in 1836 the Kurna people quickly suffered the full impact of colonisation. Within thirty years the Kurna population and culture had been decimated and survivors were mostly relocated to missions some distance away. Since the 1960s Kurna descendants have been returning to their Country from mission or fringe living, over 100 years after they were dispossessed of their lands. They have returned to a place where much of the Aboriginal meaning traditionally invested or inscribed in the landscape has been blurred or lost, particularly in the urban areas, through the political, military, economic and religious dominance of the colonisers. As will be discussed, a century and a half after South Australia was colonised a process of reconciliation has been initiated with the Kurna and other Aboriginal people who lost so much in the colonisation process.

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<sup>1</sup> There is some recent challenge from a few individuals of an adjoining Aboriginal cultural group, the Ramindjeri. As at the writing of this thesis this matter is yet to be adjudicated by the Native Title Tribunal. The claim does not have significant support.